

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

English proficiency, particularly in writing skills, is of paramount importance in today's globalised world. Within ESL classrooms, teachers play a critical role in nurturing effective writing skills that align with international standards, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This study delves into the multifaceted aspects of this crucial role, aiming to lighten various dimensions of teachers' involvement in enhancing writing skills among secondary-level ESL students. By exploring teachers' views and perceptions, practices, challenges, and strategies, this study seeks to provide insights into the intricate dynamics of ESL teaching and learning, particularly concerning writing proficiency assessment aligned with international standards. Understanding these aspects can significantly contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of ESL education and ensuring students' attainment of proficiency in writing skills aligned with global standards.

This introduction lays the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of ESL teachers' role in fostering writing skills within the framework of CEFR standards, offering valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with this critical aspect of ESL education. Subsequently, this chapter delves into the methodology employed in this study to accomplish its objectives. It encompasses clarifications on the

research approach, design, methodological approach, data collection strategies, and analysis utilised. Furthermore, considerations pertaining to validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations inherent in this study are also expounded upon.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach usually refers to the overarching direction of the investigation. In delineating the research approach, it is imperative to first contemplate the overarching direction of the investigation, which is often dictated by the research questions and objectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Silverman, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to choose a specific methodology for conducting the research, which should be based on whether it is appropriate for answering the research questions. In line with the research questions of this study (see section 1.6), the research conducted in this study aimed firstly to explore teachers' perceptions and views on the assessment of writing skills in line with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

In addition, it also aimed to investigate teachers' practices in implementing the assessment of writing skills aligned with the CEFR. Finally, the aim is to investigate the challenges and possible solutions in the implementation of writing skills assessment aligned with the CEFR. Mainly, this study aimed to answer the research questions of "what" and "how", thus, it is important to emphasise the research questions that can be answered by using a qualitative approach. This is necessary because the study requires expert knowledge of the topic. In addition, this study focuses on the experiences of

specific individuals involved in this phenomenon. Therefore, the responses of all participants are equally important and analysed fairly, using a non-statistical method.

The researcher opted for a qualitative approach in order to obtain comprehensive and detailed answers to the research questions of the study. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore extensively the intricate nuances of human experiences and reveal the underlying significances and motivations behind behaviours (Yin, 2012). It offers a comprehensive comprehension of phenomena by considering the social, cultural, and historical elements that influence them. Thus, it was appropriate to gain insights into the phenomena of how teachers apply and practise CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in the context of their roles and responsibilities in ESL teaching and learning.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which involves describing and examining current and historical situations to gain insights into complex phenomena, as suggested by Yasir et al. (2019). By adopting this approach, the research endeavours to capture the richness and depth of the phenomena being studied, allowing for the exploration of various dimensions, perspectives, and intricacies that may not be readily quantifiable. Descriptive research designs, according to Creswell et al. (2010) and Boru (2018), are well-suited for studying the participants. These designs involve collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data in the study. It helps to paint a clear picture of what is happening without trying to change or influence it. So, the use of this approach to get a good understanding of the participants and what is going on with them.

Qualitative research methodology, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), fits well with real-life situations. It focuses on capturing the genuine, detailed, and thorough aspects of these scenarios. Instead of just scratching the surface, qualitative research digs deep to understand the full picture, embracing the richness and complexity of real-world experiences. In this study, the use of semi-structured interviews and document analysis are employed as data collection following the recommendations of Dudwick et al. (2006), Gopaldas (2016), and Mohajan (2018). Therefore, the objectives of this qualitative research are pursued by analysing the insights shared by participants during in-depth interviews using the collected data. The framework of study is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

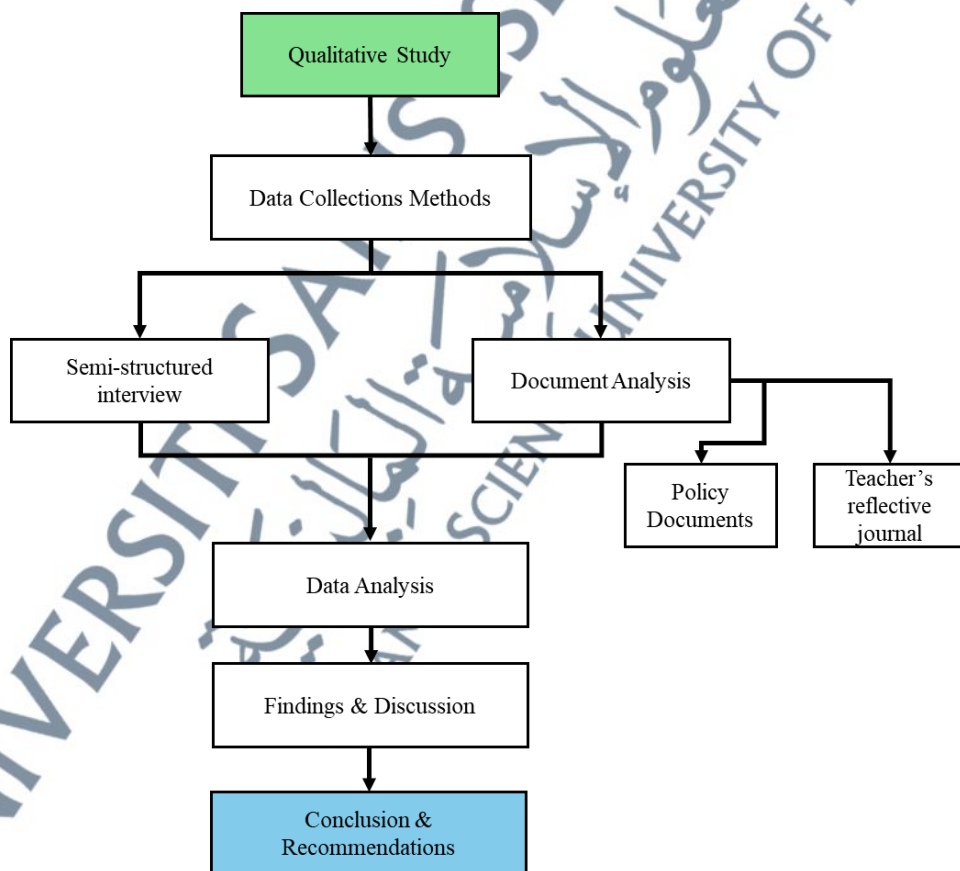


Figure 3.1: Framework of the Study

In order to thoroughly investigate a particular study, such as personal experiences, it is important to conduct interviews with several people as part of this research. It is crucial to obtain information from multiple sources to ensure the consistency and coherence of the findings (Yin, 2009). This study includes several people as participants (see section 3.6).

In sum, the presence of numerous examples increases the credibility of research (Merriam, 1998) by providing representation and triangulation. Yin (2009) agreed that the use of multiple approaches provides sufficient evidence for establishing reliability, triangulating data, and concluding this study. The proposed descriptive study outperformed the expected behaviour (Merriam, 1998). The statement suggests that the proposed descriptive study yielded results that were more significant, insightful, or comprehensive than initially anticipated, potentially providing theoretical or empirical support for this study.

3.4 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study investigates the current landscape of the Malaysian public secondary education system with a specific focus on the role of ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers in the assessment of writing skills aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the associated challenges. The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees 2440 secondary schools across Malaysia, encompassing various types such as national secondary schools, boarding schools, Form Six colleges, vocational schools, and partially government-funded schools (Ministry of Education, 2020). These institutions cater to students in Form 1 to Form 5. The study delves into the methodologies employed by teachers in assessing students' writing skills within the

framework of the CEFR. Notably, the MoE introduced a CEFR-aligned Form 3 assessment in 2019, prompting an investigation into the practices at the upper secondary level in three selected schools.

A well-chosen study site enhances the researcher's ability to gain in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation and increases the credibility of the study outcomes (Yin, 2018). Therefore, meticulous consideration is necessary when selecting a study site in qualitative research to ensure that it aligns with the research objectives and facilitates meaningful data collection and analysis. Several factors need to be considered carefully when selecting a study site, including the congruence of the site with the focus of the study, the ease of access and permission to enter the site, the likelihood of obtaining a wealth of information about a social unit, the potential for interaction and study organisation, and the unfamiliarity of the researcher with the setting.

The selection of a study site is influenced by several critical factors, including the nature and objectives of the research, accessibility to the site, permissions required for access, the suitability of the site in terms of convenience and available opportunities, and the size of the study area (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Researchers emphasise the importance of considering these factors comprehensively to ensure the appropriateness of the chosen study site and the feasibility of conducting the research effectively (Guest et al., 2006). By carefully assessing these factors, researchers can enhance the validity and reliability of their findings and optimise the research process.

The research context selected is Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This selection is due to the willingness and cooperative attitude of gatekeepers, key personnel, and research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), it is

crucial for the researcher to establish rapport and gain the trust of stakeholders within the selected schools in order to obtain access to necessary resources, data and participants. In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Creswell and Poth (2017), and Denzin and Lincoln (2018) discuss the importance of establishing relationships with gatekeepers and participants in qualitative research as influencing the access to research sites, the quality of data collected, and the ethical conduct of research.

The decision of selecting the research context was made after consultation with the Negeri Sembilan Education Department (JPNS). Therefore, the researcher often prioritised the willingness and cooperation of key stakeholders when selecting the research sites to mitigate potential challenges and enhance the overall quality of the research

In order to establish rapport with research participants, The researcher employed various strategies such as active listening, empathy, and non-judgmental attitudes to create a conducive atmosphere for communication and collaboration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the researcher meets with research participants at regular intervals to complete the study. Figure 3.2 shows the location of the study, Negeri Sembilan a sothern state of Malaysia.

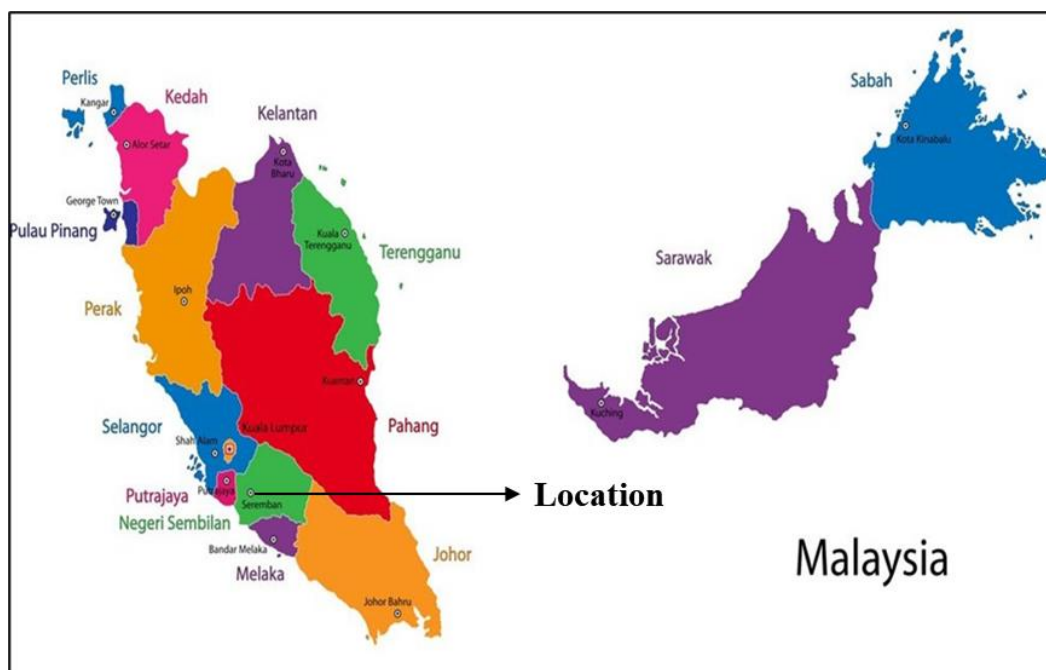


Figure 3.2: Location of the Study

Negeri Sembilan has six District Education Departments (PPD): Seremban, Port Dickson, Rembau, Jempol and Jelevu, Kuala Pilah, and Tampin. The use of purposive sampling in this study aligns with the principles of qualitative research, where the emphasis is on selecting participants who can offer rich and in-depth perspectives on the research topic. By intentionally choosing individuals with relevant experiences or knowledge related to geography and infrastructure, researchers enhance the study's validity and relevance to real-world contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Since the JPNS is located in Seremban, PPD Seremban SISC+, three Heads of English Language Panel and six ESL teachers were selected.

In selecting Negeri Sembilan as the research site, the proximity of the researcher to the geographical location holds significance. Situated within the department responsible for disseminating and reinforcing CEFR materials across educational institutions, the researcher benefits from expedient access to pertinent resources and expertise. This proximity ensures ready recourse for addressing any queries or concerns

that may arise during the research endeavour. Additionally, being based in Negeri Sembilan enhances the researcher's contextual understanding of the region, potentially fostering deeper insights and facilitating smoother engagement with relevant stakeholders within the local educational landscape.

Henceforth, the researcher successfully prolonged the study's duration, spanning over a period of two months, to meticulously gather indispensable data. The exigencies imposed by the pandemic underscored the necessity of this extension to effectively fulfil the study's objectives. Notably, the JPNS entrusted with overseeing the implementation of CEFR initiatives and training programmes in Negeri Sembilan, actively contributed to the selection of schools under investigation. Consequently, they hold comprehensive records detailing teachers' participation in CEFR courses and training sessions. Subsequently, information on the participant selection process is elaborated further in Section 3.5

3.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The use of purposive sampling is often justified in qualitative research when the aim is to gain detailed insights or rich descriptions about a particular phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016). The researcher collected data until it reached the saturation level. According to Urquhart (2013), saturation occurs when the same codes expand but no new ones are added. Other than that, with purposive sampling, researchers have the flexibility to define the criteria for selecting participants according to the specific needs of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Further information on the selection criteria of the participants is provided in Section 3.4.1

The study involved three groups of participants:

- i. ESL teachers from public secondary schools in Seremban
- ii. Heads of the English Language Panel from the selected schools
- iii. SISC+ for English language subject of the Seremban District Education Department

The selection of these three groups of participants was guided by the aim of obtaining comprehensive insights into the implementation of the CEFR-aligned assessments in the ESL classrooms within the specific context of public secondary schools in Seremban. The involvement of the Head of English Language Panel, for example, is due to the role of supporting ESL teachers in matters relating to the CEFR. In addition, the SISC+ is responsible for receiving the initial CEFR material and then disseminating it to ESL teachers through a process of cascading, coaching, and guidance. The data were collected directly from ESL teachers. By incorporating perspectives from ESL teachers, Heads of the English Language Panel, and SISC+, the study seeks to capture complex perspectives and facilitate a holistic understanding of the factors influencing new curriculum implementation and educational outcomes within the target setting.

Table 3.1 shows that participants were given code names to protect their identities.

Table 3.1: Code Names for the Participants of the Study

No	Code name	Pseudonym	Participant role
1	Teacher A	Dewi	English Teacher
2	Teacher B	Aini	English Teacher
3	Teacher C	Sarbiah	English Teacher
4	Teacher D	Nini	English Teacher

Table 3.1, continued

No	Code name	Pseudonym	Participant role
5	Teacher E	Sofia	English Teacher
6	Teacher F	Iman	English Teacher
7	Head A	Mariam	Head of English Language Panel
8	Head B	Suriani	Head of English Language Panel
9	Head C	Aqilah	Head of English Language Panel
10	SISC+	Damia	SISC+

It is important to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants involved in this study. No names or other personal information of participants were recorded in this study (Creswell, 2003).

In the progression of the investigation of this study, the Heads of the English Language Panel (HoELP) and members of the School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) were designated as proxy participants. This designation arose from constraints encountered regarding direct observation of ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers within the classroom setting, as formal permission for such observation was not forthcoming. Consequently, the HoELP and SISC+ understood a vital role in facilitating classroom observations by serving as intermediaries. Their engagement entailed providing firsthand accounts and perspectives on observed classroom dynamics, thereby augmenting the researcher's understanding of instructional practices and contextual nuances. Additionally, these proxy participants contributed invaluable insights and reflections derived from their pedagogical expertise and administrative roles, thereby enriching the qualitative data collection process.

The study focused on teachers' perceptions of CEFR the assessment practices used by ESL teachers in teaching writing skills according to the CEFR as well as

challenges and potential solutions for the challenges encountered. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the researcher collected extensive data from the participants until saturation was reached. In the context of this study, data saturation was likely reached when the researcher observed a repetition of themes, patterns, or insights across multiple participants and data sources, and no new or significant information emerged despite continued data collection efforts.

3.5.1 The Participants

Since this study uses purposive sampling, it is important to select participants based on some criteria that are appropriate for the study. The following subsections presents the selection criteria of the three groups of participants

3.5.1.1 English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers

The teachers were chosen based on these inclusion criteria;

- a) a Bachelor's Degree holder in TESL,
- b) a full-time ESL teacher at a government secondary school,
- c) have more than five years of teaching experience in English secondary school,
- d) have experienced a shift in the curriculum from purely summative assessment to summative and formative assessment,
- e) teach Form Four or Form Five classes.

In the context of this study, a careful selection criterion was applied to identify ESL teachers teaching upper secondary students who completed the Form Three Assessment (PT3) in the year 2019. These students hold particular significance as they

represent the first cohort subjected to the CEFR aligned assessment, introduced in 2017. Given their exposure to CEFR-aligned instructional methodologies through prior participation in CEFR familiarisation, cascading, and training sessions facilitated by the State Education Office (JPNS), these teachers offer valuable insights into the implementation and impact of CEFR-based pedagogical approaches.

In order to ensure the identification of suitable participants meeting these criteria, the researchers collaborated with JPNS officers who provided recommendations of ESL teachers possessing requisite qualifications and experiences aligned with the study's objectives. This targeted selection approach aimed to secure a participant cohort equipped with relevant contextual knowledge and instructional backgrounds conducive to generating comprehensive findings pertinent to the research questions.

If the inclusion criteria were met by more than three ESL teachers, the researcher invited all teachers suggested by the JPNS to a short face-to-face interview or online meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to determine which teachers were willing to participate in the study. During this meeting, potential volunteers were given a comprehensive overview of the study's objectives, duration, research methodology, and data collection techniques. After the briefing, participants gave their verbal consent and were given the consent form (refer to Appendix 3) to return to the researcher at a later date. Yabar (2013) cited McNally (2009) as a reference for the informed consent form.

In order to accommodate logistical considerations such as participant availability and scheduling constraints, the researcher sought access to the teachers' timetables. Upon reviewing these schedules, which typically accommodated three to six teachers simultaneously, the researcher made use of this information to finalise the participant

selection process. Subsequently, an additional evaluation was conducted to ascertain the optimal number of participants for inclusion in the study. As a result of this assessment, the final participant count varied within the range of three to six individuals, contingent upon the specific considerations of the selection criteria and logistical feasibility.

3.5.1.2 Heads of English Language Panel

During the semi-structured interview phase, the participation of the Head of the English Language Panel was sought. Initially, in collaboration with a JPN officer, efforts were made to identify Heads of English Language Panels among English teachers within the same school. However, participation was declined by one Head of the English Language Panel for unspecified reasons. Subsequently, with the assistance of the JPN officer, the Head of the English Language Panel was identified in another school within the same district. These Head of the English Language Panel oversee the instructional activities of teachers within their respective schools, rendering their inclusion ideal for this study. Their proximity to teachers allows for close collaboration and direct observation of teaching practices. Furthermore, their administrative responsibilities afford them privileged access to information regarding new courses and training initiatives within the school setting.

3.5.1.3 School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+)

This study specifically involved a School improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) from the Seremban District Education Department. The English SISC+ was selected to collect data on the CEFR-aligned assessment and to share information from their classroom observation. Therefore, they have limited access to observe the teachers.

Therefore, the responses of the sample accurately reflect the perspectives of the entire population (Unisa, 2000). As only one SISC+ was involved, the SISC+ is referred to as a code name (as shown in Table 3.1)

The inclusion criteria for English SISC+ typically involved considerations such as preference was given to individuals with qualifications and professional backgrounds in English language education, curriculum development, or educational leadership, thereby ensuring their capacity to provide informed insights and perspectives on CEFR implementation and English language pedagogy. Then, their prior involvement in CEFR-related initiatives, training programs, or curriculum development activities were prioritised, as their familiarity with CEFR principles and methodologies would enhance the relevance and depth of their contributions to the study.

Collaborating with officers from the District Education Office (JPNS), who possess intimate knowledge of local educational contexts and personnel, facilitated the identification and recommendation of suitable candidates within the English SISC+. Recommendations were based on candidates' qualifications, experiences, and perceived capacity to contribute meaningfully to the research objectives. Through a collaborative and systematic approach involving consultation with JPNS officers and adherence to predetermined selection criteria, English SISC+ members were purposively selected to participate in the study. This ensured the inclusion of individuals best positioned to offer informed perspectives and insights on CEFR implementation and English language education at the district level.

This study was also considered to involve SISC+ because they were given the accessibility and availability of SISC+, particularly their ability to visit schools and

conduct classroom observations. Given their roles within the district education department, it was essential to select individuals who could feasibly engage in on-site observations and provide valuable insights into classroom practices.

3.6 RESEARCH METHOD

In this case study, the research methodology employed comprised semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Specifically, the document analysis component centred on examining teachers' reflective journals and pertinent policy documents. The objective of utilising these instruments was to address the four research questions delineated in Table 3.2. The ensuing data analysis matrix, delineated below, serves to concisely explain the interrelation between the research questions, the employed methodologies, the utilised instruments, the involved participants, and the subsequent data analysis method.

Table 3.2: Data Analysis Matrix

Research Question	Methods	Participants/ Sources	Instruments	Data analysis
How do teachers perceive and view the implementation of CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms?	▪ Semi-structured Interview ▪ Document analysis	▪ Heads of English Language Panel ▪ SISC+ ▪ English teachers ▪ Existing Policy Documents	▪ Semi-structured interview protocol ▪ Checklist	▪ Reflexive Thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti 9
How do teachers practice the implementation of CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms?	▪ Semi-structured Interview	▪ Heads of English Language Panel ▪ SISC+ ▪ English teachers	▪ Semi-structured interview protocol ▪	
What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms?	▪ Document analysis	▪ Existing Policy Documents ▪ Teachers Reflective Journals	▪ Checklist ▪ Guidance for Reflection	
How do teachers deal with the challenges they encounter in implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms?				

Data gathered from interview protocol and checklist were analysed to explicate key themes, yielding an extensive reservoir of data crucial for fulfilling the study's objectives. Through the integration of diverse methodological approaches and the development of tailored research instruments, the acquired data attains both significance and relevance within the study context.

Furthermore, the research objectives were thoroughly examined to gather necessary information, thereby highlighting the themes explained in the interview protocol, teachers' reflective journals, and data analysis checklist. From this rigorous analysis, five distinct themes emerged, each precisely selected to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. Subsequently, these themes were categorised into five discrete sections, providing a structured framework for addressing the research questions. The researcher's ability to discuss the analysis was enhanced by the clearly defined themes and increased control over the interview transcripts. Table 3.3 shows the five sections.

Table 3.3: Sections in the Interview

Section	
i	Views on implementing CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills
ii	CEFR-aligned assessment practices for writing skills
iii	CEFR-aligned assessment challenges for writing skills
iv	CEFR-aligned assessment strategies to manage challenges in writing skills

Table 3.3 presents the selected themes divided into four focused sections. These themes were used in the interview protocols (refer Section 3.7.1), and document analysis checklist (refer Section 3.7.2).

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interview

This study employed semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection instrument. Within qualitative research, semi-structured, in-depth interviews hold particular significance as they serve as a predominant source of qualitative data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). According to Rabapane (2020), interviews are instrumental in capturing participants' ideas, opinions, perspectives, and experiences within qualitative inquiry. Specifically, semi-structured interviews facilitate the gathering of data on a predefined topic from individuals possessing pertinent personal experiences, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. During these interviews, researchers pose open-ended questions to one or more participants and meticulously document their responses, thereby enriching the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2003).

The interviews were structured into two distinct parts. The initial segment centered on elucidating participants' backgrounds, pedagogical beliefs, and prior experiences. Subsequently, the second part meticulously addressed all four primary study objectives. These objectives encompassed exploring teachers' perspectives on the assessment of CEFR, examining the implementation of writing skills, identifying challenges encountered during implementation, and proposing potential solutions to enhance writing proficiency within ESL classrooms.

The researcher employed an interview protocol (refer to Appendix 5) comprising open-ended questions, serving as a structured guide to inquire about topics outlined earlier in Section 3.5. This method facilitates participants' expression of thoughts and opinions, thereby enabling the collection of comprehensive data. The inclusion of follow-up questions, probes, and comments further enriches the interview process.

Abdul Ghafar's observation (1999) underscores this point by emphasising that interviews provide a platform for participants to share their views as long as they remain relevant to the research questions. This aligns with the notion that interviews in qualitative research are guided conversations rather than rigid interrogations. Participants are encouraged to express themselves authentically, contributing to the richness and depth of the data collected

Adam (2015) concurs that the adaptability inherent in interviews sustains participants' engagement and enhances the researcher's credibility. By employing a comprehensive semi-structured interview approach, this study facilitated the exploration of instructors' perspectives, opinions, thoughts, and emotions regarding the subject matter (Cheng & Doernyei, 2007). The use of open-ended questions is particularly valuable in educational research contexts where exploring participants' attitudes and comprehension of new educational initiatives, such as a curriculum, is paramount (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By allowing teachers to articulate their thoughts in their own terms, researchers can gain profound insights into the complexities of their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum.

The semi-structured interviews had separate interview schedules to help the researcher focus on the topic and ensure that each participant answered similar questions (Patton, 2002). The SISC+ interview guide was designed to elicit their views on CEFR-aligned assessment and the demands of the new curriculum on teachers. It helped teachers to apply the new curriculum. At the same time, SISC+ and the Heads of English Language Panel also provide the external viewpoint where an observation from the proxy participants may offer a more objective or neutral perspective.

Participants might be too embedded in the situation to see it objectively, so the observer's interpretation can bring clarity to unconscious or nuanced behaviours. This could include body language, social dynamics, or non-verbal cues that participants may not be aware of or do not self-report.

Third-party (by the proxy participants) observations can serve as an additional layer of data to corroborate or challenge the participants' self-reported experiences, adding depth to the analysis and ensuring more robust findings (Patton, 2014). The observations of teachers by SISC+ and the Heads of English Language Panel, coupled with their feedback to the researcher, provide a form of triangulation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' views and perceptions as reflected in their actions which highlighted for Research Question 1.

Prior to the introduction of the CEFR, the Heads of English Language Panel organised a cascade training for the teachers. The English teachers in the study implemented the revised curriculum. Table 3.4 summarises the interview schedules for the teacher groups in the study.

Table 3.4: Overview of Interview Schedule for Interview Protocol

Participant	Main Question
SISC+	Teacher's background Perceptions on CEFR-aligned assessment Observation experience Training and support Teachers' challenges Ways to manage challenges and recommendations about CEFR-aligned assessment and writing skills

Table 3.4, continued

Participant	Main Question
Head of English Language Panel	Teacher's background Perceptions on CEFR-aligned assessment Observation experience Training and support Teachers' challenges, Ways to manage challenges and recommendations about CEFR-aligned assessment and writing skills
English Teachers	Teacher's background Perceptions on CEFR-aligned assessment Training and support Challenges Ways to manage challenges and recommendations about CEFR-aligned assessment and writing skills

For analysis purpose, each participant was given a code based on the instruments used. This is shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Semi-structured Interview Codes

Participant	Label
Teacher A	Teacher A_Int1
Teacher B	Teacher B_Int1
Teacher C	Teacher C_Int1
Teacher D	Teacher D_Int1
Teacher E	Teacher E_Int1
Teacher F	Teacher F_Int1
Head A	Head A_Int1
Head B	Head B_Int1
Head C	Head C_Int1
SISC+	SISC+_Int1

In anticipation of potential challenges during data collection, such as those arising from unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher recognised the necessity for a contingency plan. The proposed solution involved adapting physical

interviews to online formats using virtual meeting platforms or video and voice calls. Furthermore, the researcher anticipated the possibility of prolonged online data collection due to various factors and constraints, including but not limited to internet connectivity issues, scheduling conflicts, and participant availability.

3.6.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method in which materials are examined and analysed in order to understand their meaning and importance (Morgan, 2022). This method can be used to analyse different categories of documents, including letters, reports, emails, and other text documents. The process of analysing documents involves identifying, selecting, evaluating, and combining the information contained in the documents. Unlike methods such as interviews or surveys, document analysis does not involve interaction with human participants or the manipulation of variables, thus making it non-reactive (Bowen, 2009; Liamputtong, 2013). It is a cost-effective research strategy that can be applied to a variety of topics and investigations. Consequently, two instruments of document analysis are used in this study to increase the completeness of the study's data: the teacher's reflective journal and the policy documents, as explained in more detail in the following sub-sections.

3.6.2.1 Document Analysis: Teacher's Reflective Journal

Reflection is used in many teacher education programmes to help teachers clarify their teaching practise. It also involves examining and evaluating these ideas to help them analyse and improve their teaching (Conway, 2001; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Freese, 2006; Çimer, 2013). According to Higgins (2021), the integration of reflective practices within educational research, shedding light on the influence of epistemological

beliefs and methodological approaches on the reflective process. By exploring the intersections between reflection and research in education, this study contributes to the broader discourse on reflective research practices, thereby informing the discussion on the significance of reflection in scholarly inquiry within this study.

The adoption of self-reflection stemmed from two primary considerations: firstly, the limitations imposed by the Ministry of Education, which impeded the feasibility of traditional classroom observations. The challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in settings with a moderate number of attendees, concentrated in-person observations impractical. Secondly, participants lacked the essential resources for conventional observation methods, prompting the exploration of alternative approaches. Drawing upon insights from Lutz and Paretti (2019), this study emphasises the inhibitive effects of limited accessibility on observational research. Reflective journaling emerged as a viable alternative, enabling participants to engage in self-analysis and expressive their learning experiences despite constraints. This study contends that reflective journals offer an intricate platform for participants to document, analyse, and critically evaluate their teaching processes while fostering transparency, as supported by Vicary et al. (2017).

This thesis explores the utilisation of teachers' reflective journals as a valuable source of data to address key research questions pertaining to CEFR-aligned assessment, writing skills, implementation challenges, and pedagogical solutions within ESL classrooms. The study adopts a focused approach, guiding participants to reflect on specific elements related to their teaching practices rather than engaging in broad, unfocused reflections. By centering on the day-to-day activities of writing teaching and

prompting responses to targeted questions on CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment, the reflective journals provide rich insights into the instructional dynamics. The researcher thoroughly documented pertinent details such as the date, time, and location of each reflection session to facilitate systematic data analysis (see Appendix 4). While some researchers may perceive the use of reflective journals as ungainly, this strategy highlights the pivotal role of qualitative analysis and enhances research transparency, as advocated by Jasper (2005). For analysis purpose, each journal was given a code based on the instruments used. This is shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Teachers' Reflective Journals Label

Participant	No of journal	Label
Teacher A	Journal 1	Teacher A_J1
	Journal 2	Teacher A_J2
	Journal 3	Teacher A_J3
	Journal 4	Teacher A_J4
	Journal 5	Teacher A_J5
	Journal 6	Teacher A_J6
	Journal 7	Teacher A_J7
	Journal 8	Teacher A_J8
	Journal 9	Teacher A_J9
	Journal 10	Teacher A_J10
Teacher B	Journal 1	Teacher B_J1
	Journal 2	Teacher B_J2
	Journal 3	Teacher B_J3
	Journal 4	Teacher B_J4
	Journal 5	Teacher B_J5
	Journal 6	Teacher B_J6
	Journal 7	Teacher B_J7
	Journal 8	Teacher B_J8
	Journal 9	Teacher B_J9
	Journal 10	Teacher B_J10

Table 3.6, continued

Participant	No of journal	Label
Teacher C	Journal 1	Teacher C_J2
	Journal 2	Teacher C_J3
	Journal 3	Teacher C_J4
	Journal 4	Teacher C_J5
	Journal 5	Teacher C_J6
	Journal 6	Teacher C_J7
	Journal 7	Teacher C_J8
	Journal 8	Teacher C_J9
	Journal 9	Teacher C_J10
	Journal 1	Teacher C_J2

3.6.2.2 Document Analysis: Policy Documents

Building upon the foundational work of Yin (2012) on the pivotal role of documents in corroborating research findings, this study employs document analysis to augment data obtained from interviews. By triangulating multiple sources of data, the researcher seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. Document analysis emerges as a valuable tool in social research, facilitating triangulation methods that integrate diverse approaches to explore common themes, as advocated by Bowen (2009). Through an examination of methodological considerations and practical applications, this thesis explains the cooperative relationship between document analysis and other qualitative research methods, thereby enhancing the depth and validity of case study investigations.

This study emphasises the adaptability and accessibility of documents as valuable sources of information. By examining the comparative advantages of documents over traditional research papers or studies, as highlighted by Bowen (2009), this study clarifies the rationale behind the widespread use of document analysis in contemporary

research endeavours. Moreover, drawing upon Morgan's (2022) proposition that books, journals, and written materials can serve as interview data, and the insights from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) regarding the descriptive richness of such sources, this study delves into the methodological implications of integrating document analysis into qualitative research methodologies.

Through a combination of theoretical frameworks, practical considerations, and empirical evidence, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of document analysis in enhancing the depth and breadth of qualitative research investigations. Document analysis is used to gain deeper insights into the research questions. In this study, the primary materials on the integration of the CEFR into the education system in Malaysia were analysed. The documents are included in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Existing Policy Documents and Labels

No	Existing Policy Document	Label
1	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) Tingkatan 5 (MOE, 2020)	Doc_DSKP_T5_2020, page
2	Teacher Guide Implementing the CEFR-aligned Curriculum: Planning and Managing Learning (MOE, 2019)	Doc_Teacher_Guide_2019, page
3	Teacher Guide Implementing The CEFR-Aligned Curriculum Planning and Managing Learning Second Edition (MOE, 2020)	Doc_Teacher_Guide_2020, page
4	English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: Planning in Retrospect, Implementation and Prospective Planning (MOE, 2021)	Doc_ELR_2021, page
5	English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 (MOE, 2015)	Doc_Roadmap_2015, page
6	Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2013)	Doc_MEB_2013, page
7	English Language Management Guidebook (MOE, 2019)	Doc_ELMG_2019, page

These resources facilitated the researcher's comprehensive evaluation of the study and enriched their understanding of CEFR-aligned writing assessments in ESL classrooms. Moreover, they served as channels for gathering teachers' perspectives, practices, strategies and apprehensions regarding CEFR implementation. The interviews and the teachers' reflective journals complemented the document analysis, expanding the depth and breadth of the study. By providing insights beyond those attainable through interviews alone, they enabled triangulation of data, thus strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Three main research instruments used in this study are interview protocol, teachers' reflective journals guide, and document analysis to collect all the data. These are explained in section that follows.

3.7.1 Instrument: Interview Protocol

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview method before it was validated by experts. The assessment of writing skills in ESL curricula linked to the CEFR was conducted using twenty guiding questions based on the themes in Table 3.1. After a series of ten to twelve writing lessons and the completion of their twelve reflective journals, the three English teachers were interviewed.

English teachers were interviewed after ten to twelve writing lessons to ensure that they had sufficient experience and exposure to the teaching and learning processes related to writing instruction. This timeframe was supported by Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, (2005), whereby researchers allowed teachers to familiarise themselves

with the curriculum, instructional materials, and students' progress in writing skills development by conducting interviews at this stage, researchers could capture teachers' informed reflections and insights based on practical experience rather than solely relying on initial impressions or theoretical scenarios.

Additionally, interviewing teachers after a substantial number of lessons provided an opportunity to delve into their evolving perspectives, challenges encountered, and strategies employed throughout the instructional period. This approach enhances the depth and richness of data collected, enabling researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in teaching writing aligned with CEFR standards in ESL classes.

As mentioned in section 3.1, distinct sets of questions were tailored for each participant group. Following the specifications outlined in section 3.9.1, a collaborative session among CEFR experts was conducted to ensure the reliability of the assessment. Ahead of the scheduled interviews, the interview questions underwent rigorous scrutiny by two experts affiliated with the Malaysia Examination Syndicate (MES), specialising in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an English lecturer from Gaya Teacher's Institute, and a lecturer from the Research and Innovation Department of the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC).

The questions underwent rigorous validation with the participant group, with irrelevant inquiries being amended or discarded prior to interview sessions (refer to Appendix 6 for details). Following the transcription of interviews, participants were afforded the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcribed content. This qualitative approach enabled the capture of participants' nuanced thoughts, opinions,

and experiences, aligning with Denzin and Lincoln (2018) assertion regarding the value of interviews in exploring subjective perspectives. Subsequently, though interviews focused on the CEFR-aligned assessment of writing skills in ESL classrooms, the researcher effectively analysed participants' perceived challenges and potential solutions from their vantage points.

The interviews delved into the participants' perspectives on the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment, enabling an in-depth examination of the challenges encountered in this context. This approach facilitated the researcher's exploration of the intricacies surrounding CEFR-aligned writing assessment and its integration by the Heads of English Language Panel and SISC+ during their observation of ESL writing classrooms. Engaging participants from diverse management levels of leadership yielded comprehensive research insights. To ensure a thorough understanding, the researcher must engage in a two-way dialogue during interviews with teachers, fostering open communication and facilitating the acquisition of comprehensive data.

Following the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), an interview lasting between 30 minutes and one hour was conducted with each participant to ensure effective data collection while maintaining participant engagement and cooperation. This is supported by Adam (2015) recommended a maximum duration of one hour for semi-structured interviews to avoid fatigue for both the interviewer and the participant. The researcher conducted the interviews until the point of data saturation of the study was reached. The online interviews were digitally recorded using Google Meet in mp4 format with the explicit permission of the participants. When analysing the data, the

interview data was transcribed to verbatim transcription. The interview transcripts contained the basic themes.

The interviews adhered to a conventional structure, affording researchers the flexibility to pose predetermined questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Commencing with inquiries pertaining to personal experiences aimed primarily at establishing rapport and fostering participant comfort, the interview subsequently transitioned to explore specific thematic areas. The interview protocols were informed by the findings of the literature review, strategically homing in on themes aligned with the research objectives.

Participants in the semi-structured interview gave their perspectives on the CEFR-aligned assessment and shared their experiences according to their respective roles. The interviews provide answers to all remaining research questions. Teachers can use self-reflection to examine their approach to teaching writing and their methods of coping with the difficulties associated with CEFR-aligned assessment. Document analysis was then used to further validate the alignment of their assessment with the CEFR. Table 3.8 shows sample interview protocol.

Table 3.8: Sample Items in the Interview Protocol

Themes	Questions for teachers	Questions for SISC+ and Head of English Language Panel
View on implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment.	Should the CEFR-aligned assessment be implemented for understanding the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills?	Should the CEFR-aligned assessment be implemented for writing skills? Describe your understanding of the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills
CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment practices.	Are you aware of the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills in the ESL classroom? How?	From your observations, are teachers aware of CEFR-aligned assessment being used for writing skills? How?
CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment challenges.	What challenges do you face when implementing the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills? Please describe.	From your observation, what challenges do teachers face when implementing the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills? Please describe.
CEFR-aligned assessment ways to manage challenges for writing skills.	Can you please describe what you do when you face any challenges with the CEFR-aligned assessment?	Can you please describe what you do when teachers face challenges with the CEFR-aligned assessment?

Rubin and Rubin (2011) assert that questioning participants can yield more comprehensive and insightful responses, thereby enhancing the depth of data collected. Despite changing circumstances, the researcher prioritised and adapted social skills such as active listening, relationship building, and demonstrating empathy. Throughout the study, participants were encouraged to articulate their experiences and focus on addressing the research questions. The researcher demonstrated patience and expertise in asking pertinent questions, relying on participants' ability to elucidate their life experiences (Creswell, 2013). Despite the potentially lengthy duration of interviews, the researcher remained committed to collecting vital data for the study. Participants were afforded the opportunity to provide additional details or elaborate on their responses.

3.7.2 Instrument: Document Analysis Checklist

The document analysis recorded everything about the implementation of the CEFR-aligned assessment in Malaysia. The document analysis helped to support the previous instruments in data collection until saturation is reached in this study. It analysed the content according to themes such as focus groups or interview transcripts (Bowen, 2009; Rabapane, 2020). When selecting documents, researchers considered various factors. Flick (2018) suggests four criteria for document selection in Table 3.9.

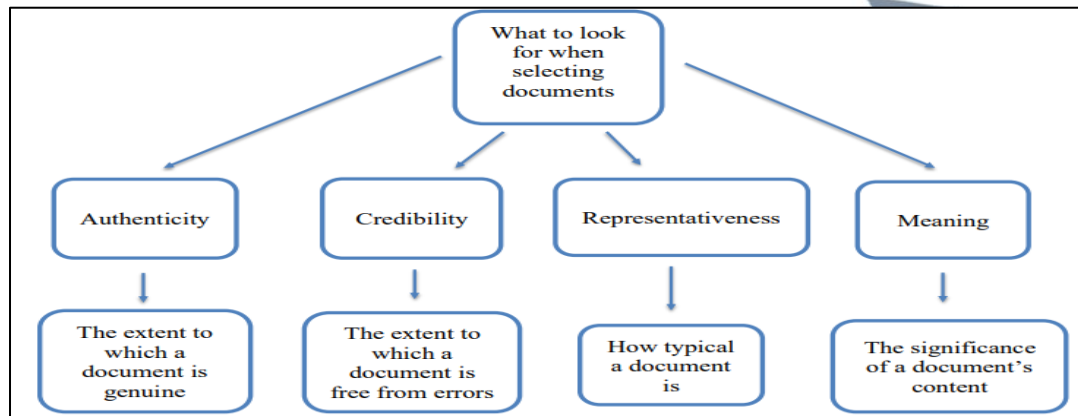
Table 3.9: Four Factors to Consider When Deciding Which Documents to Choose for Document Analysis

Factors	Description
Authenticity	A document's authenticity is measured by its authenticity (Dunne et al., 2016). A document can have inconsistent content, including font, handwriting, and language variations. Establishing if a document is a primary source is one approach to gauging its legitimacy.
Credibility	Credibility is determined by how accurate and undistorted the source is (Dunne et al., 2016). Researchers must determine whether the sources used to produce the documents are trustworthy to determine whether they are credible (Flick, 2018).
Representativeness	The representativeness of a document refers to how common it is. A document lacks representativeness if it contains peculiar content rather than information that resembles the content of some other texts on the same subject.
Meaning	Meaning is the relevance of a document's content and whether the evidence is understandable and clear. The meanings of documents might be literal or figurative, and the literal interpretation focuses on a document's face value.

Source: Flick (2018)

The researcher carefully chose documents pertaining to the implementation of the CEFR provided by the Ministry of Education, ensuring alignment with the ministry's aspirational objectives. These documents were considered authentic and credible, serving as the primary source of references for the study. Their authenticity and accuracy are unquestionable, capturing the essence of the education system and the CEFR framework. Furthermore, these documents are representative and meaningful,

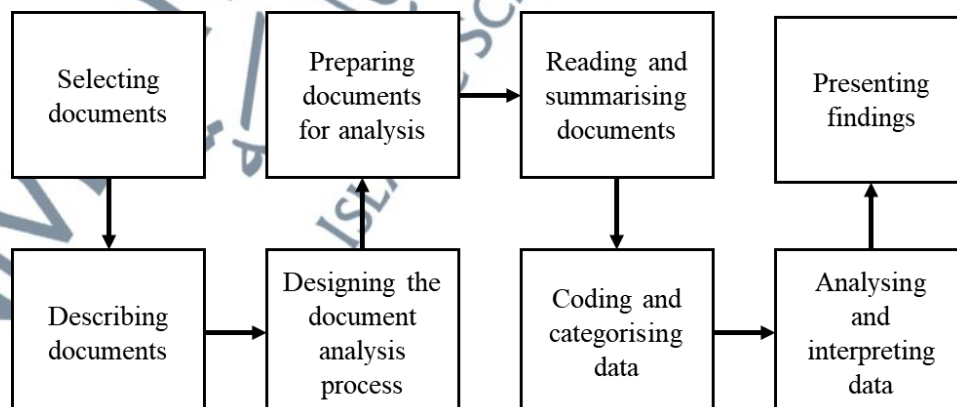
providing valuable insights into the subject matter of the study. Kridel (2015) clarified four key factors guiding the selection of documents, which informed the researcher's decision-making process in this regard. This is shown in Figure 3.3:



Source: Kridel (2015); Morgan (2022)

Figure 3.3: Factors to Consider in Selecting the Document

The researcher then conducted the document analysis using a basic checklist. Before document analysis, the researcher must plan (Md Taib, 2018) to guarantee results. The data of the documents must be listed. For the analysis, the researcher used O'Leary's (2014) eight-step process. Figure 3.4 illustrates O'Leary's 8-step planning method for document and text analysis.



Source: O'Leary, 2014

Figure 3.4: 8 Steps Planning Process of Document Analysis

O'Leary (2014) outlines eight stages of document analysis, which are commonly used by researchers to thoroughly examine and interpret various types of documents. These stages are as follows:

- a. **Selecting documents:** The first stage involves identifying and selecting the relevant documents for analysis. Researchers should consider the research questions or objectives and choose documents that are most pertinent to their study.
- b. **Describing documents:** Once the documents are selected, researchers describe them in detail, including their content, format, source, and any other relevant information. This step helps in understanding the nature of the documents being analysed.
- c. **Designing the document analysis process:** Researchers develop a systematic approach or framework for analysing the selected documents. This may involve creating coding schemes, categorisation methods, or other analytical tools to facilitate the analysis process.
- d. **Preparing documents for analysis:** Before analysis begins, documents may need to be organised, digitised, or otherwise prepared for examination. This stage ensures that the documents are in a suitable format for analysis.
- e. **Reading and summarising documents:** Researchers carefully read and summarise the content of each document, extracting key information, themes, and patterns. This step involves comprehensively understanding the material within the documents.

- f. **Coding and categorising data:** In this stage, researchers systematically code and categorise the data extracted from the documents based on predetermined criteria or emergent themes. Coding helps in organising the data for further analysis and interpretation.
- g. **Analysing and interpreting data:** Researchers analyse the coded data to identify trends, relationships, and insights relevant to their research questions or objectives. This involves comparing and contrasting different documents, examining patterns, and drawing conclusions from the data.
- h. **Presenting findings:** Finally, researchers present their findings from the document analysis in a coherent and meaningful manner. This may involve writing research reports, creating visualisations, or communicating findings through other mediums to share insights with the academic community.

These eight stages provide a structured approach to document analysis, enabling researchers to systematically analyse and interpret various types of documents to generate new knowledge or insights.

As part of the study, teachers' teaching writing skills experiences were also documented in their reflection journals using an assessment based on the CEFR. The instrument served as a means of collecting all data, as this study needed to document the process. During a joint reflection and discussion session, the CEFR experts reviewed the guiding questions before the researchers distributed the link to the English teachers. They are two CEFR officers in the Malaysia Examination Syndicate (MES), an English lecturer from Gaya Teacher's Institute and a lecturer from the Research and Innovation

Department of the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC). In this study, the researcher utilised the teacher's reflective journals as she was unable to follow the entire lecture (Morgan, 2022).

The researcher coordinated the timing of data collection and determined the research setting. The researcher developed a Google form as journal guidance for the teacher's introspective journal that was more user-friendly and consistent with the research aims of the study. To achieve consistency, the same format was used for each reflection form. The semi-structured interviews with the English teachers utilised the data from their reflective journals to shed light on their classroom assessment practices and obtain further information.

3.8 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, this part includes all methods of instrumental research. The development of interview methods and a checklist for document analysis such as reflective journals guide for the teachers and policy documents prior to conducting the fieldwork. In addition, it is essential that the participants have a comprehensive understanding of the study and are willing to devote a significant amount of their time to conducting the study (Neuman, 2000).

Adhabi and Anozie (2017) utilised an interview technique as a tool for in-depth data collection as documented in Appendix 5. The content included an introductory overview of the case study, the individuals involved, the advantages, disadvantages, and difficulties, the maintenance of confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the provisions for compensation and reimbursement. Before starting the study, the

researcher sent invitations, information sheets (see Appendix 2), and consent forms (see Appendix 3) to the selected participants by email. This decision was made for ethical reasons to ensure that both the schools and the participants understood the study and actively participated in the data collection. Before scheduling the interviews, the researcher took into account exam weeks, school events, public holidays, and school holidays.

3.8.1 Preliminary Study

Despite the inclusion of peer debriefings to confirm the accuracy of the interview protocols and the guidelines for the reflective journal, the researcher decided to also conduct a preliminary study. The potential benefits of the qualitative researcher's preliminary study may go unnoticed despite its advantages (Ghani et al., 2019). The preliminary study can improve the overall quality of research by testing the feasibility, practicality, and acceptability of study designs and interventions (Yin, 2009). The preliminary study can help researchers make informed decisions about the structure and conduct of larger studies, ultimately saving time and resources (Thabane et al., 2010). Therefore, this preliminary study is an important part of the research process and can help researchers conduct more rigorous and impactful studies.

The researcher conducted a trial of the interview process with an ESL teacher, the Head English Language Panel and SISC+ to assess the feasibility of using these instruments and to obtain the necessary data for the study's research questions. They are from different districts even though they are researching the same topic but they met the criteria as the actual participants. The ESL teacher then completed the Google Form

for the reflective journal and all participants were interviewed using the same instruments.

After the preliminary study had been done, the interview protocols and research questions were improved, restructured, and reorganised. Research question 2, which originally aimed to investigate how teachers implement CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms, was revised to make it clearer which is to investigate teachers' practices in implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms. Meanwhile, the Google Form guide for the teachers' reflection journal was appropriate and acceptable. Thus, the researcher had sufficient confidence to conduct the study during fieldwork, although improvements during data collection were deemed appropriate. The preliminary study minimised the technical inaccuracies in the interview protocols and journal entries.

3.8.2 Semi-structured Interview Procedures

The JPN officer selected the school teachers and the Heads of English Language Panel as well as the School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) for the semi-structured interview. The researcher left the choice of the location for the interview sessions to the participants. The participant received an email with information about the study and its objectives. The individual agreed to participate in an interview and subsequently provided details of the schedule and location by telephone.

The Heads of the English Language Panel were chosen at the same educational institution as the three teachers selected by JPNS. One member of the Heads English Language Panel had to cancel due to a busy schedule. JPNS then suggested another

person from the other school to attend. The participants agreed again and discussed the schedule and location of the interview over the phone. The participants were informed of the details by email.

Finally, the three ESL teachers were interviewed. After agreeing during the previous meeting, they sent the consent form by email. They were interviewed after they had completed their reflection journals over a period of ten to twelve weeks. Meanwhile, another three ESL teachers were interviewed earlier because they did not submit any reflective journals. Participants were asked about the introduction of a writing skills assessment based on the CEFR. The researcher recorded the challenges associated with using CEFR-orientated assessment in ESL lessons, drawing on her personal experience. Following the transcription process, the resulting transcripts were emailed to the participants for them to read. Once consent was given, the semi-structured interview data was collected and systematically organised.

3.8.2.1 Interview Techniques

In order to conduct semi-structured interviews, the researcher must have a thorough understanding of the exploratory strategies used in qualitative research. Qualitative research requires purposeful dialogues between the interviewer and the participants. A comprehensive understanding of one's background and clear expectations are of utmost importance. However, in the role of the interviewer, it is the researcher's task to facilitate and support the conversations rather than actively direct them. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) suggest six probing techniques for conducting semi-structured interviews: Wait time, Follow-up, Verbal Consent, Expand, Explain,

and Guide. The exploratory approaches of the researcher suggested by DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) are listed in Table 3.10

Table 3.10 The Probing Techniques in a Semi-Structured Interview

Probing technique	Description	Example
Wait time	The researcher/ interviewer does not say anything after asking a question. This gives the participant time to consider their answer and frequently prompts the participant to reply.	What do you know about the CEFR? (Await the participant's response before asking any more questions.)
Follow up	The researcher/ interviewer asks the participant to elaborate more by summarising or repeating their comments.	So it was challenging to implement CEFR without the textbook.
Verbal consent	The researcher/ interviewer utilises positive language to prod the subject to say more.	Yes... Okay... Agreed...
Expand	The researcher/ interviewer probes the subject for more information on a specific response.	Tell me your opinion more. Can you give an example of that? Can you describe that?
Explain	The researcher/ interviewer queries the participant to elaborate on a particular statement.	Tell me what you mean when you say the imported textbook is 'misleading'.
Guide	The researcher/ interviewer requests a reasoning explanation from the participant.	You said you decided only to assess students writing after they finished writing an essay. Tell me how you came to that decision.

Source: Adapted from Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2019)

Prompts facilitate dialogue and elicit important information. Meanwhile, verbal cues include actions such as agreeing, succinctly summarising the main argument, and repeating what the participant has said (Kallio et al., 2016; Hatch, 2002; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Therefore, the researcher listened carefully to the participant's explanations during the semi-structured interview. This is because even a single utterance from the participant has the potential to elicit a more comprehensive explanation and thus facilitate the collection of additional data. The researcher also observed the participants' emotions and tone of voice, which prompted him to ask

further questions. The semi-structured interview conducted in this study revealed that the researcher highly valued the participants' perspective on the topic.

3.8.3 Document Analysis Procedures

Document analysis is a method of qualitative research that involves a methodical review of documents in order to decipher their meaning and gain a deeper understanding of the research subject. This method is highly adaptable and can be used to examine different types of documents, such as written texts, visual material, audio recordings, and digital artifacts. Document analysis methods differ depending on the research topic, the type of documents to be analysed, and the theoretical framework of the study (Krippendorff, 2018). The use of document analysis together with other data collection techniques such as interviews, surveys, or observations to deepen the understanding of the research objectives. Two different documents were analysed for this study. They are the teachers' reflective journals and the policy documents.

3.8.3.1 Document Analysis Procedures: Teacher's Reflective Journal

The initial document analysis procedure involved analysing the teacher's reflective journal. After each lesson, the participants carried out a self-reflection on their writing lessons. Participants self-reflect on how they assessed their students' writing skills based on the CEFR to ensure the authenticity of the data and to prevent researcher bias. Teachers submitted their reflective journals using a Google form at the end of each writing lesson, once a week. Teachers wrote their self-reflections immediately after each lesson to ensure that no details were omitted. A few teachers submitted their reflective journals in the format of Microsoft Word documents, using whichever format they found most convenient.

3.8.3.2 Document Analysis Procedures: Policy Documents

Another document analysis involved policy documents. Bowen (2009) suggested that materials such as interview transcripts are coded into themes. Careful reading, re-reading data from selected documents, coding, and category building are the techniques. The researcher selected materials based on O'Leary's eight processes and variables (see Figure 3.4 in Section 3.6.3). Step eight is to examine the conscious data or content of the documents.

After deciding what to look for, the researcher recorded and counted the occurrences in the document. The study objectives organised the data. The researcher found patterns in the materials and methodically arranged them for further study. The researcher classified them for later investigation using thematic analysis. Interviews and the teachers' reflective journals complemented the data from the document analysis. The data from the document analysis helped the researcher to better answer the questions of the study.

The researcher analysed six documents, which were:

- a. *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) Tingkatan 5, Teacher Guide Implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum: Planning and Managing Learning,*
- b. *Teacher Guide Implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum: Planning and Managing Learning Second Edition,*
- c. *English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: Planning in Retrospect, Implementation and Prospective Planning,*

- d. English Language Education Reform: The Roadmap 2015-2025,
- e. Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB), and
- f. English Language Management Guidebook were examined by the researcher.

The document checklist was used to analyse the data of the papers and understand the change in English language education in Malaysia.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analysed all the qualitative data collected from different sources: semi-structured interviews, teachers' reflective, and document analysis. The data obtained from this study were thoroughly analysed, described, and interpreted as shown in Figure 3.5

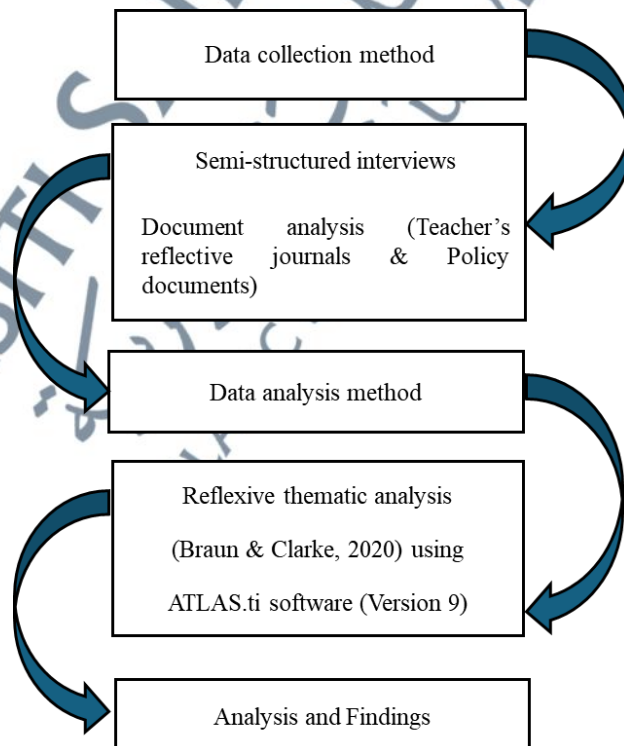
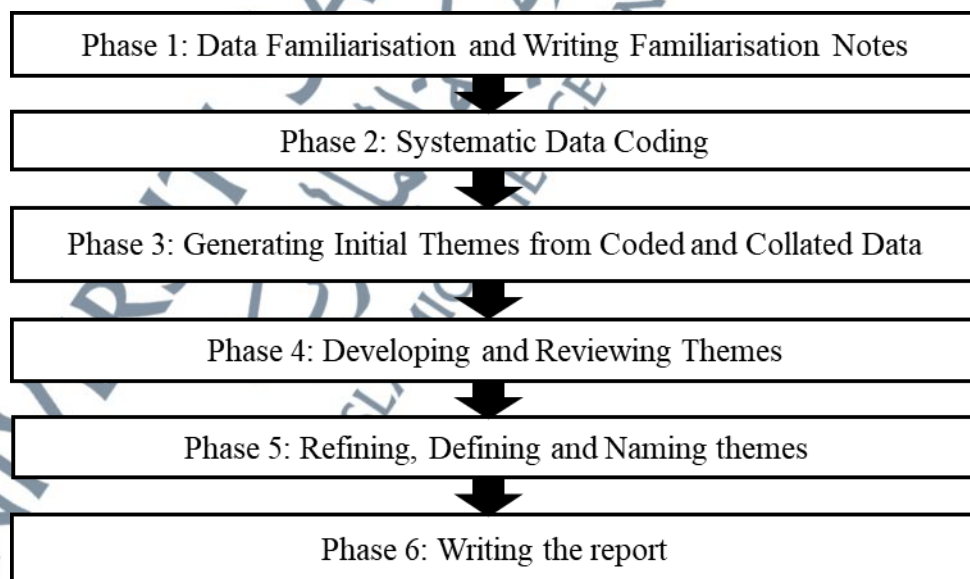


Figure 3.5: Research Methodology Framework

Figure 3.5 illustrates that the documentation and analysis process was designed to provide data clearly and understandably, to identify trends and relationships in line with the research objectives. An analysis of methods and data sources was conducted to examine the practices observed by students and teachers in the writing classroom.

3.9.1 Data Analysis Procedures

The researchers used Braun and Clarke's (2020) method of reflexive thematic analysis in the qualitative study. This is a technique for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and representing themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). It is less challenging for inexperienced researchers to analyse (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The different methods used in this study revealed different data patterns. Thematic analysis facilitated the researchers to deal effectively with large data sets by categorising them into overarching themes to address all research questions. Figure 3.6 illustrates the sequential steps of reflective thematic analysis.



Source: Braun & Clarke (2020)

Figure 3.6: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In the reflexive thematic analysis, the data from the transcription of the interviews, the teacher's reflective journal, and the policy documents were analysed in six steps. The audio data was transcribed and then entered into ATLAS.ti 9 to analyse the semi-structured interview. The information extracted from the teacher's reflective journals was converted into Microsoft Word files using Google Forms. Once the data was imported, it was analysed using ATLAS.ti 9. Finally, codes were created to categorise the induction data and themes, such as 'immediate assessment', 'CEFR aligned assessment training', 'varied classroom assessment practices', and others. The data provided here included both results and suggestions. The powerful citations and annotations in the thematic analysis report demonstrate the increasing importance of the concepts and lead to new insights (Nowell et al., 2017). The results provided comprehensive answers to all research queries.

The interview excerpts, the teacher's reflective journal, and the policy documents analysis are labelled in the ATLAS.ti 9 programme file as shown in Tables 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study using these sections. The data was stored in Google Drive and is accessible online. The data analysis served as the basis for the subsequent phase and the final interview of the study. The researcher was able to shape, add, develop, or delete irrelevant information in the study based on participant feedback. A robust data management and storage solution facilitated streamlined and systematic data analysis after data collection, improving efficiency and organisation.

As described by Braun and Clarke (2020), the researcher was prepared to initiate phase 1 of reflexive thematic analysis, which consisted of familiarising herself with the data and documenting familiarisation notes. Following the interview, the researcher

reviewed and transcribed the audio recordings. Both summaries and full interview transcripts were then attached (see the sample interview transcripts provided in Appendix 8). Following the data collection, the teachers' responses were documented in Google Forms and then analysed. The summaries were saved as digital copies. The interview transcripts, the reflection notes, and the checklist analysis were saved in three separate files.

The researcher employed memo notes, consisting of phrases and keywords, as part of her data analysis procedures. This method facilitated the expression of the researcher's initial thoughts, which were then elaborated upon and interconnected with other data points. The process of coding the data proved to be engaging, enabling the rapid identification of emerging trends. Emphasising the importance of comprehensively understanding all data, this approach prioritised the examination of raw data, laying a solid foundation for subsequent analytical methods.

Phase 2 of reflective thematic analysis began after data collection (systematic coding of data). The codes are suggested by the member checker to be short, distinctive terms or phrases that give meaning to the data. A more comprehensive coding template can help define, refine, and name codes. Once the coding framework or template is established, the codes are applied to the data extracts, and any patterns are logged for theme development (Braun & Clarke 2020).

Once the entire was coded, the data was organised in phase 3 (creation of initial themes). In this phase, the coded and organised data extracts are analysed for themes (Braun & Clarke 2020). Themes were created by analysing, merging, comparing, and graphically mapping code links. The main themes connected the data and answered the

research questions. As the themes have not yet been established, they need to be kept until the next phase.

In phase 4 (Theme Development and Assessment) the coded data underwent categorisation into themes to ensure their relevance and practicality. During this phase, data extracts were reorganised, and themes were adjusted to accurately represent the well-structured data. Themes underwent inclusion, merging, splitting, or removal as necessary. Throughout this iterative process, comprehensive records were maintained to facilitate the researcher's ability to establish connections between themes and to provide a clear pathway for reviewing findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

The coding methodology and consistent themes were modified after all data components relevant to the research question were included. The relevant themes of the dataset are of utmost importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to revisit the dataset at this point. The process of reviewing and recoding new or changed themes is done to collect more data (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

In phase 5, which involves refinement, definition, and identification of themes, it is crucial to explore the themes in the final report with conciseness and descriptive clarity (Braun & Clarke, 2020). It is essential to ensure that themes do not overlap. Subcategories are employed to expand on themes and establish data hierarchies. Each theme is meticulously defined by its scope (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step involves the selection of data for the report, which ultimately summarises and describes the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Completing the reflexive thematic analysis involves writing the report. Beginning the writing process early is crucial while taking notes, describing challenges, and selecting facts. According to King (2004), this step is a continuation of analysis and interpretation. Narrative reports offer a more comprehensive, concise, and reasoned interpretation of both data and topic selection (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012).

Enhancing the analysis involved linking the themes to pertinent research findings and delving deeper into the discoveries. A thorough analysis of existing research can guide the selection of suitable topics for further investigation. Following the completion of coding in Atlas.ti 9, the researcher opted to utilise Microsoft Excel to review the coded themes. This method helped prevent redundancy in themes across various study requirements and offered an additional tool for meticulous organisation and categorisation of the data.

3.9.2 Data Analysis Tool: ATLAS.ti 9

ATLAS.ti 9 is Computer-assisted (or aided) (CAQDA) qualitative data analysis software that manages data and reports. ATLAS.ti 9 promotes emergent qualitative research rather than a sequential series of activities (Silver & Lewins, 2014). The coding software made the data analysis repeatable, which would have been difficult with note cards, word processors, or spreadsheets.

The researcher coded all themes into ATLAS.ti 9. Finally, ATLAS.ti 9 was used to match the codes with all participants' responses to create clearer themes. In this way, all the basic themes can answer the research questions. Networks organise the data codes and themes (Woolf, 2008). ATLAS.ti 9 enables this by linking a selected set of

codes with relationships. The aim is to show what the researcher already knows, consciously or unconsciously, and how the codes change as they are expanded. Figure 3.7 illustrates the network of ATLAS.ti 9.

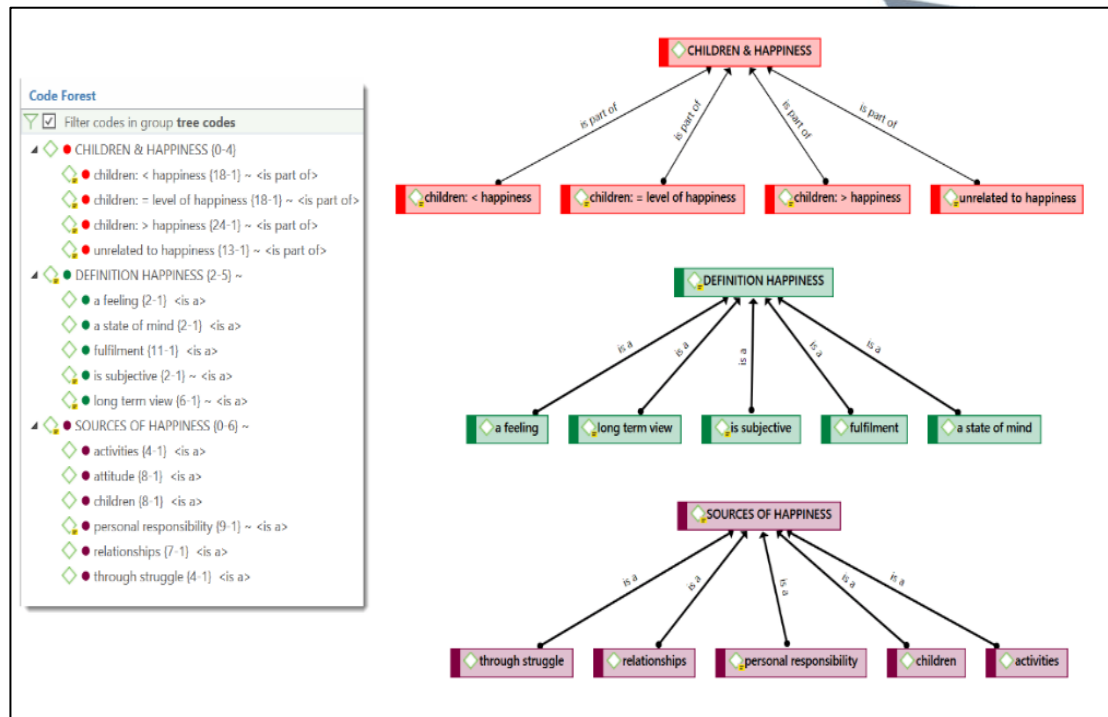


Figure 3.7: Example of the Network in ATLAS.ti 9

ATLAS.ti 9 helped the researcher organise the data into codes and themes that later answered all the research questions. The expected emergent themes were derived from the lives of the research participants by familiarising the data with the coding process.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Adherence to both school and personal ethical standards is imperative during data collection. This study incorporated five ethical considerations, as outlined in Figure 3.8. Before initiating contact with the proposed educational institutions, approval from the EPRD KPM (refer to Appendix 10) was secured. Subsequently, the researcher sought

approval from the FPBU Dean before reaching out to the Negeri Sembilan State Department of Education (JPNS) and the school principals. Interviews were then conducted with individuals recommended by the JPN. Ahead of the researcher's school visits, principals were provided with consent forms from the JPNS and information sheets detailing the study.

After obtaining all required permissions, the researcher convened with all participants at the designated location to achieve several objectives: a) foster a positive rapport, b) deliver a thorough overview of the study and associated expectations, c) establish interview schedules, and d) coordinate classroom schedules with teachers. To streamline the process and prevent redundancy, participants' class schedules were identified and reviewed. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, teachers' busy schedules, and the pressing need for learning, all meetings were conducted remotely.

The researcher reiterated the concept of informed consent during the meeting. Howe and Moses (1999) assert that informed consent is the paramount principle of research ethics. Therefore, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participations in the study. All participants were informed in advance about the guidelines of the study. The instructions given to participants before data collection included the research objectives and the specific conditions of the study.

Prior to the interviews, teachers were informed about the study and the need for audio recording for analysis. The researcher used Google Meet to document the interviews. Only the researcher and the supervisor have access to the audio files, transcripts, and printouts of the participants' comments. The confidentiality of all data

is guaranteed. Figure 3.8 provides a brief overview of the sequence of actions associated with ethical consideration.

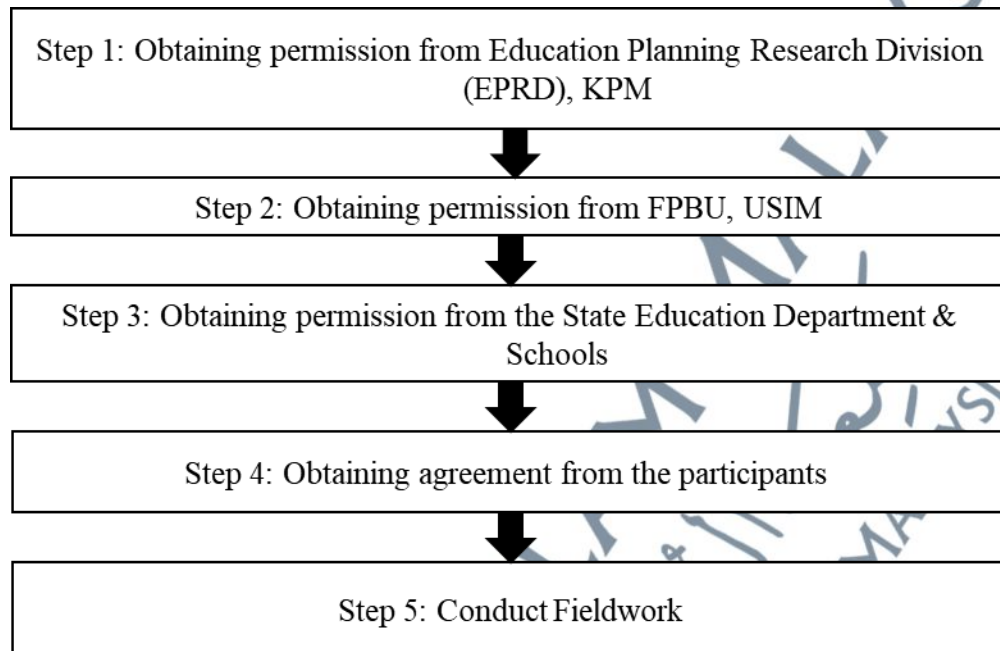


Figure 3.8: Ethical Consideration Procedures

3.11 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

The presence of validity and reliability in qualitative research increases accuracy and minimises bias (Mohajan, 2018). Reliability and validity are essential in qualitative research to ensure high quality and reliability (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004; Yin, 2009). The reliability of the data depends on the ability of the participants to provide consistent, stable, and repeatedly accurate information, as well as the competence of the researcher to collect and document this information (Babbie, 2016). Kuhn (2012) assert that scientific findings must be accurate and truthful to be considered valid. A valid study must accurately reflect the truth, while a valid instrument or measure must accurately reflect the specific aspect it is intended to measure, along with consistent and stable participant data.

For this study, a total of three groups of educators were interviewed. This facilitated the collection and diversification of comprehensive information. Data analysis of this study involved semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and policy documents. Participant observation and interviews can underpin the triangulation of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2018). This study examined the observations of the Heads of English Language Panel and SISC+ and their experiences with ESL teachers in ESL writing classrooms.

The validity of the study also was enhanced through triangulation, which was achieved by conducting interviews and analysis documents such as the teacher's reflective journals and policy documents. In accordance with the Ministry of Education regulations, classroom observation instruments were replaced by reflective journals for this study. The involvement of knowledgeable and willing individuals to keep journals increased the accuracy and reliability of the information collected. Participants wrote the journals themselves to ensure the integrity of the data.

The interviews, the teachers' reflective journals, and the study of the policy documents therefore corroborated and reinforced each other. The use of many data collection techniques prevented the researcher from relying solely on one method. The data was strengthened by information and evidence gathered from multiple methods and sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the study, peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checking are used as primary methods to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the results.

3.11.1 Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing is a process of sharing and discussing the interview experience with an outside colleague. This serves as an analytical session to uncover aspects of the interview that the interviewee may not have disclosed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Hail et al. (2011) define peer debriefing as the involvement of a subject matter expert who has no vested interest in the success of the project. According to Figg et al. (2009), peer debriefing is a method used in qualitative research to ensure the credibility of the study.

To enhance the credibility of the study, the researcher invited Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) specialists from different education departments to participate in the peer debriefing. There were two assistant directors from the Malaysian Ministry of Education were assigned to evaluate and disseminate the CEFR in schools in Malaysia and a lecturer from Gaya Teacher's Institute who specialises in English language teaching provides CEFR training to trainee and current teachers. They have extensive knowledge of the CEFR and the Malaysian education system.

Finally, another peer debriefing was a lecturer who is part of the English Language Teaching Centre's (ELTC) Research and Innovation Department and has worked closely with the CEFR. This lecturer has taught both the Master Trainers and the SISC+, who are experts in this field and also conduct peer debriefings. Despite the initial disinterest of some experts, their expertise played a crucial role in the success of the study.

3.11.2 Triangulation

Triangulation facilitates the understanding of a scenario and underpins the research results (Morgan, 2022). To avoid bias, researchers can use different data sets and employ different methods of data collection (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022). Empirical data that comes from multiple sources enables the process of triangulation (Yin, 2009). Triangulation is achieved by using many sources.

The research questions were supported by conducting semi-structured interviews, and analysis of the teacher's reflective journals and policy documents. In addition, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), triangulation refers to the use of multiple research methods to examine a particular topic. Triangulation avoids the constraints associated with using only one method (Yin, 2009; Grey, 2013) and allows for a more comprehensive assessment of validity (Yin, 2009). Case studies facilitate the inclusion of many sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Data was collected from three volunteers who were engaged in the same activities, were in the same locations, and had the same time frame.

Semi-structured interviews and document analysis which consist of teacher's reflective journals and policy documents were used for triangulation in this study. The inclusion of empirical data obtained through the qualitative methods enhances the study by adding rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth (Flick et al., 2004). Integrating and analysing the data resulted in a comprehensive data set that underpins the research objectives. The analysis involved the triangulation of three basic approaches. The content was analysed and the CEFR-aligned assessment processes for ESL students' writing skills were evaluated using three techniques.

3.11.3 Member checking

The validity and trustworthiness of this study were further verified through member checking. In qualitative research, member checking is used as a means of ensuring trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1995; Creswell & Miller, 2000) and validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher, as proposed by Candela (2019) asked one or more study participants to confirm the data or results, and once validated, they completed the validation form (see Appendix 7).

To enhance data reliability, participants meticulously reviewed transcripts, ensuring accurate identification of themes and subthemes to prevent misinterpretation by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher consulted a CEFR specialist from the Research and Innovation Department of the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) to validate the themes and subthemes for accuracy and reliability. This collaborative verification process is detailed in Appendix 7.

Participant verification of content and topics is crucial for the researcher's understanding and analysis of semi-structured interviews. English teachers, the Head of the English Language Panel, and SISC+ comprised the participants in this study's semi-structured interviews. As recommended by Yin (2014), any inconsistencies identified by participants warrant further data collection to ensure completeness and accuracy of the findings.

3.12 SUMMARY

The justification for using qualitative case study methods has already been highlighted in this chapter. Key aspects of planning include research design, research

methodology framework, data collection and analysis framework, reliability, validity and trustworthiness, triangulation, and ethical considerations. The following chapters continue with the results and findings of the study.

